The Exceptional Presenter
A Proven Formula to OPEN UP! and Own the Room
by Timothy J. Koegel

"You either have 'it' or you don't." Although that phrase is often used when describing exceptional presentation skills, Timothy J. Koegel, a presentation and media consultant who has worked with clients such as Harvard Business School and Cisco Systems, believes otherwise. According to Koegel, exceptional presenting is a learned skill that requires the development of a certain set of characteristics and a lot of practice. And, with The Exceptional Presenter, which debuted at #1 on the Wall Street Journal bestseller list and #4 on the New York Times Advice/How-To bestseller list, Koegel spells out how to develop these skills and use them in a variety of situations. From conventions to one-on-one sales calls, from Keynote speaking to job interviews, and from board meetings to job fairs, this book contains all of the material you will need to master the skill of presenting.

To begin laying the framework of his ideas, Koegel defines an exceptional presenter as one who is Organized, Passionate, Engaging, and Natural in his style. He also adds that effective presenters make a real effort to Understand their audiences and make time to Practice their presenting skills. By focusing the lessons in this book on these six traits, Koegel systematically teaches aspiring presenters how to improve their communication skills and ignite their presentations.

In lesson one – Organized – Koegel provides the framework to construct a presentation that is clearly defined. The objective is to provide the presenter with the means to inform and influence the audience without overwhelming or confusing them.

In lesson two – Passionate – Koegel explains the difference between believing in your presentation and communicating that belief to your audience. Through lessons on body language, voice, and facial expressions Koegel teaches the reader how to project passion and ignite passion in the audience.

With lesson three – Engaging – Koegel explains the importance of connecting with the audience and building effective rapport. The techniques in this lesson teach the reader how to involve the audience and keep their focus.

In lesson four – Natural – readers are taught how to feel comfortable and confident in their presenting skills and how to project that feeling to their audience. Once this technique is mastered the presentation takes on a conversational style that is less alienating to the audience than a preplanned speech.

Finally, in lessons five and six – Understand and Practice – Koegel explores the importance of researching your audience and practicing your presentation. Exceptional presentations focus on the needs of the audience, address their
concerns, and spell out actual ways to meet their goals. However, no matter how targeted your information is, your audience will never buy into your solution if you fumble your way through the explanation.

Lesson One: Organized

Good organization alleviates pre-presentation nerves and helps presenters deliver an effective and powerful message. The two keys to achieving this objective are creating structure in your presentation and projecting an organized style.

There are three parts to a presentation: the opening (summarize what you are about to tell your audience), the body (present the material) and the closing (summarize what you just told the audience). The opening statement should be clear, concise, and geared towards defining the purpose of your presentation. This can be achieved by using the following framework. Begin your opening with a purpose statement. The purpose statement will work to enlighten your audience about the key points of your presentation, prepare them to absorb those key points, and help keep them focused on those points throughout the entire presentation. An effective opening statement could be: "The key point I would you like you to remember today is..."

Next, introduce the body of your presentation with an objective statement. This statement should identify the key points or purpose of your presentation. An example of such a statement is: "My mission is to help you identify potential issues related to..." Follow this statement with the information you have come to present. During this section of the presentation make sure that you take time to evaluate the audience's reaction.

Good questions to insert throughout the presentation include: "Is there anything else I need to address before proceeding?", or "Is everyone with me so far?" Then, end the body of your presentation with an explanation of the benefits you have to offer and an action plan. Examples of great action plan statements for informal meetings at your own company are: "Let's meet again next Friday to discuss your thoughts," or "I would like to meet with your team to select a leader to manage this project."

"Our company would like to help you launch this new project by April 1st" is an example of an action plan statement that could work at a sales presentation. And, "We are ready to help your business take this solution to the next step. Please call me at the number listed on the handout to set an appointment for your company" is an appropriate call to action when addressing multiple prospects at a convention.

Finally, conclude your presentation with a summary of your key points ("As you can see my previously mentioned key points — insert key points here — play an important part in this situation."), and make a solid purpose statement. According to Koegel, what you say last is what your audience will remember most. Think about the impact a purpose statement such as: "Keep in mind that the destiny of this organization is not a matter of chance, it is a matter of choice. The choices we
make in the next 30 days will decide our fate” will make on your audience.

Once you have your presentation structured it is time to concentrate on looking organized. For this objective Koegel teaches the 60/20 rule. Arrive 60 minutes prior to your presentation. Use the first 40 minutes to arrange the tables and chairs if needed, set up any equipment or props, and organize your presentation area. The remaining 20 minutes should be spent welcoming quests, starting conversations with members of the audience, and gathering information about the audience. By following this rule you can start your presentation off without any hesitation or fumbling, appear relaxed and organized, and be ready with relevant pieces of information from the audience that you can incorporate into your presentation. This extra step will convey the image of diligent preparation and research.

By following this system for every presentation you will look organized and feel confident. Plus, proper preparation will allow you to focus less on what to say and focus more on how you say it.

Lesson Two: Passionate

Passionate presenters are more persuasive. However, transferring your passion to the audience can be tricky without the right delivery skills. The four areas of delivery that need the most attention when impassioning your speech are Posture, Gestures and Movement, Voice Command, and the Elimination of Hesitation and Verbal Graffiti.

Your posture in front of an audience can be very telling. By standing up straight and keeping your chin up and pointed towards the audience you can project a sense of confidence, credibility, and professionalism. Plus, your posture can help you portray an attitude of interest, excitement, and passion. The most effective presentation posture is what Koegel calls the “hands at the sides” stance. In this posture your arms hang loosely at your sides, your hands and wrist are relaxed, and your fingers are pointing downward. This position helps a presenter appear relaxed, confident and open to the audience. This posture position should become the base of your presentation style. After every meaningful gesture you should fall back into this posture until the next time you need to make a point.

Postures to avoid during your presentation include having your hands in your pockets (this posture conveys passiveness and over-confidence), resting your hands on your hips (this posture conveys a challenging and defiant attitude), having your arms crossed in front of you (this posture conveys a restrained and closed off attitude), and crossing your hands behind your back (this posture relays a sheepish, withholding information attitude).

The second delivery skill concentrates on effective hand gestures. The correct gestures can emphasize a key point while ineffective gestures can take away from a solid statement and turn the audience’s focus away from the information you are delivering. Effective gestures include “The Claw” — an arm extended, palm flat, fingers pointing towards the audience or screen gesture — which reflects an
image of professionalism and draws the audience’s focus towards the
presentation props, “Numbers” — a gesture that involves using your fingers to
mimic the numbers you are speaking about — helps solidify the point in the minds
of the audience, and “Comparison Gesturing” — a gesture that is intended to
mimic the information as it would be illustrated on an overhead slide. For
example, numbers, dollars amounts, revenue, and percentages are usually
illustrated with vertical bar charts. To mimic this point raise your palms vertically in
front of the audience. To demonstrate chronological sequences or stages of a
project raise your palms horizontally to mimic the horizontal timeline graphs used
on overheads slides.

Once you have perfected the movement of your hands during a presentation it is
time to concentrate on voice command. In order to convey passion, interest and
confidence during your presentation you need to practice control over the volume,
inflection, and tempo of your voice. A soft volume will convey feelings of
weakness or inadequacy and a loud volume will seem overbearing and
overconfident to the audience. The proper volume is one that allows you to be
heard by the entire audience but that does not come across as screaming. Speak
up but don’t yell.

As for inflection, the tone of your voice can have a bigger impact on the audience
than the actual words you are using. Avoid a monotone inflection, which can bore
the audience and shorten their attention span, and focus more on expanding the
tone or mood of your voice to match your statements. For example, you would
never say: “Profits have decreased from 13% to 11% in the last quarter” with a
smile on your face and an uplifted tone to your voice. Instead you would use a
strong, pensive tone that conveys the seriousness of the situation.

Finally, when practicing your voice command you will need to pay attention to the
tempo of your speech. A rushed presentation makes the speaker sound nervous,
ieffectual, and unprepared. However, by pacing your speech — Speak, Pause,
Breathe, Speak — you can more effectively articulate your message, give fuller
impact to your words, and keep the focus of your audience on your message.

The last skill needed for injecting passion in your presentation is the elimination
of hesitation and verbal graffiti. The use of verbal graffiti — the injection of unneeded
words and phrases such as "um", "like, "you know what I mean" and "OK"- takes
away from the impact of your message and makes you appear unprofessional and
unprepared. Record yourself during phone conversations or while practicing your
speeches to become aware of how often you use verbal graffiti or hesitation
before making a point. Then, concentrate on removing these habits from your
natural speech process.

Once you can control your body and your voice to convey passion you need to
learn how to transfer this passion to your audience and engage their interest.

Lesson Three: Engaging

Successful presenters know how to show genuine interest in their audiences,
which in turn helps the audience show interest in the presenter's message. The five main mistakes that presenters make that can turn their audiences off are talking about themselves excessively, avoiding eye contact, forgetting to smile, reading as opposed to speaking their message, and using inappropriate humor. In order to properly engage your audience and quickly build a genuine rapport Koegel advises that you use his "11 Rules of Engagement."

Rule 1: Speak to the interests of your audience. While it can sound impressive to list your elite clientele, boast about your numerous locations or years in business, or even state your previous success record, what the audience really wants to know is what your information can mean to their company and how it can add value to their business. Always keep your presentation focused on the needs and interests of the audience.

Rule 2: Use stories, examples, and anecdotes. The facts of your presentation are important; however, stating fact after fact can overwhelm your audience. Break up the presentation of information with informative and engaging stories and examples. This will help your audience remember the message and give it more meaning and impact.

Rule 3: Eye contact is an essential engagement tool. A lack of eye contact with the audience can make you appear insincere, arrogant, preoccupied, and disinterested in your subject and your audience. To gain the interest and respect of your audience make sure that you maintain eye contact with the audience throughout your presentation and that you vary your eye contact from person to person (holding that contact for at least three seconds) so that no one feels left out.

Rule 4: Don't waste time talking to inanimate objects. You may need to glance at your notes, displays, or flip chart briefly during the presentation but you should avoid staring away from the audience for prolonged periods during your delivery. Make sure you always focus your eye contact on the place it matters most — the audience — because as Koegel states: "No screen, flip chart, dry erase board, floor, ceiling, or conference table has ever made a decision!"

Rule 5: Smile. A genuine smile is a presenter's most important tool. Smiling indicates that you are relaxed, confident, approachable, and prepared.

Rule 6: Use names early and often. Like a smile, the use of names can help a presenter appear prepared. However, the use of names can also help build rapport with the audience, create participation, and grab their attention. Inject names when you really want to make a point or when you feel the interest of the audience drifting.

Rule 7: Get to your feet. According to Koegel standing presenters can better control the flow of information and assume a more commanding posture in front of the audience. Standing helps the presenter maintain eye contact (even with those in the back of the room), lets the presenter be seen and heard more easily, and allows for greater movement which further engages the audience.
Rule 8: Use current events and periodicals. In order to make your message seem more current and relevant it is important to use timely stories that are directly tied to your information. Referencing a story from that day's newspaper has a bigger impact on your audience and makes your information seem fresh.

Rule 9: Humor. Humor can be effective for building rapport with an audience and also setting them at ease, however, it can also alienate the audience if used incorrectly. If you choose to use humor Koegel advises that you frame it in a story as opposed to in the form of a joke, that you make sure the story ties in with your message, and that you pay attention to the audience's reaction and adapt any future stories accordingly.

Rule 10: Read your audience. It is not enough to simply perfect your body language, voice, and expressions. To truly engage your audience you must be able to read their reactions and gauge their interest. By watching the facial expressions of the crowd you will be able to pick up on disinterest, confusion, and agreement immediately. You can use these emotions to steer your presentation for the most impact. For example, if you see someone frowning in confusion after you have made a point you may need to take a moment to pause and ask for questions.

Rule 11: Get your audience involved. People remember more of what they have participated in than of what they have just been told and heard. In order to help your audience retain more of your information you need to find a way to get them involved in the development of your message. Effective techniques for increasing audience involvement include asking questions and waiting for a response, using the phrase: "Write this down" followed by a list, handing out an outline that includes blanks for the audience to fill in, asking for audience opinion, conducting surveys, and opening up group discussions.

Now that you have learned three important skills for exceptional presenting it is important to learn how to look natural while utilizing those skills.

Lesson Four: Natural

The ability to look and act natural during your presentation does not require that you be born a natural presenter. Regular practice can help your presentation flow easily, help you look relaxed and prepared, keep your tone fluid, and keep your information engaging. However, the key to looking natural lies in the ability to practice correctly.

Simply memorizing a well-scripted presentation can make the delivery sound stiff or canned. However, if you first write the presentation in a conversational tone using words you would use in normal conversation you can avoid a "speechy" tone. When writing your speech keep in mind that the written word does not flow the same when spoken out loud. Read your words out loud as you write them and change phrases, pauses, and expressions to keep the tone of the presentation engaging, lively, and interesting. The following example showcases the difference between the impact of the written word and the spoken word. Read both out loud
to understand the difference.

Scripted:
"As team leader and project manager I am happy to be given this opportunity to speak with each of you about this promising situation. Your presence at this meeting is greatly appreciated and will go far in helping our company achieve its intended goals."

Conversational:
Hello everyone and thanks for coming. I know that it took some effort to clear your busy schedules for this meeting but your time and energy is greatly appreciated and will definitely impact our ability to meet our goals."

Now that you understand the importance of the first four lessons, it is time to put those skills into practice by learning ways to further understand your audience so that you can better develop your new skills and better focus your practicing techniques.

Lessons Five and Six: Understand and Practice

According to Koegel, the quickest way to connect with an audience is by demonstrating that you understand their business, their issues, and their concerns. But, how can you demonstrate this knowledge without learning it first? To help you uncover this information about prospective buyers outside of your company quickly and easily, Koegel has formulated a list of research tips.

- Read the company’s marketing material, brochures, and web site content.
- Use an Internet search engine to compile background information on key individuals that will be in attendance at the presentation.
- Seek out television broadcasts, newspaper articles, and magazine stories about the company you are presenting to.
- Read the company’s latest newsletter, and their annual report, mission statement, and performance numbers.
- Visit the company offices or retail location.
- Use the same methods to gather information about the company’s biggest competitor.

Once you have this information you can use it to answer the following questions in order to better focus your presentation on the needs and interests of the audience.

- Who will be in attendance at the presentation and what are those individual’s job responsibilities, needs and expected outcomes. For example, if the purchasing manager will be attending, his concern will most definitely be cost. Incorporate information from performance numbers and the annual report into the benefits portion of your presentation.

- Why is your information relevant to the audience? For example, if your software bundle promises to streamline customer orders and shipping,
include examples in the body of your presentation that showcase the cost savings of your software for those in finance, the decreased error rate of your software for those responsible for customer service, and the ease of use and limited new training required for the managers in attendance.

- What key points would have the most impact on your audience? For example, if a company’s mission statement emphasizes their commitment to protecting natural resources during the course of business then a great key point for your presentation would be how your product reduces product wastes or uses less electricity.

Once you have tailored your presentation to your audience it is time to practice, practice, practice. With enough practice the previous skills will become second nature. Don’t just practice these skills prior to a big presentation. Get the most out of these lessons by applying them to everyday life. Stay conscious of your body language, voice control, facial expression, and word usage during every conversation, work meeting, telephone call, voice mail opportunity and personal exchange.

Strive to inject the lessons on passion, engagement, organization, understanding, and naturalness at every opportunity. Ask friends, colleagues, and family members for feedback. And, most importantly, keep a practice journal to mark your progress and track your results. In this journal include a space for each day of the week where you can check off your practice time and make comments about your efforts. Also include room for feedback notes received from others.

For added impact also include a space to note information on presentation skills observed in others. Why did these people impress you? What gestures or expressions would you like to imitate? How did their conversations make you feel? Review the journal every Friday and tailor your next week’s practice session to include those areas you need to work on and improve.

**Conclusion**

No matter how you use your presenting skills — whether it is in front of 2000 people at a convention or one-on-one in your next job interview — the key to coming off as exceptional lies in your ability to look organized and natural while engaging the audience and sharing a passion. With the skills and techniques presented by Timothy Koegel and a little hard work and practice on your part you can soon be on your way to successful communication and to earning the title of Exceptional Presenter!